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“Must melancholia be left to the physicians, psychiatrists, and psychoanalysts? Is it solely a mental illness?”

Paul Ricoeur — *Memory, History, Forgetting*

**INTRODUCTION**

**Preface**

One afternoon, while on my way home, I engaged in a conversation with a neighbor of Kurdish descent. Since she recently had graduated in a field of studies related to mine, we came to talk about cultural identity, and also of her identity as a Kurd. When she told me that she did not actually speak Kurdish before she moved to Sweden, I wondered if it had not been hard for her to fully participate in the Kurdish culture without language. “Language doesn’t matter that much” she replied, “I have always felt like a Kurd, anyway”. Her statement sounded so simple, but lingered in my mind for several days, and a number of questions took shape.

How come she had such a strong cultural identity without the (in my mind) essential ingredient of language? Can loss of part of ones culture actually in itself be part of cultural identity? Which contributing factors allow it to be, and which hinder it? In what ways, and in what contexts, is this something positive and something negative, respectively?

I realized that these questions, or rather the fact that I asked them, had strong connections to the way in which our world, geographically, socially and ethnically, is divided into nations, and to the way we view cultural heritage as something dependent on this notion of nationality.

Some weeks later I attended a lecture at Multicultural Centre about Swedish racism and whiteness, where the nationalistic and xenophobic surge in today’s political discourse was explained as melancholia, a grief process. The old, well-known, safe society is changing, partly disappearing, and people feel immense sorrow and pain. Coupled with the self-perception of Swedes as civilized, utterly modern and in several ways superior, these feelings spur a new, fiercely nostalgic identity, well disguised under a sensible and politically correct vocabulary, and without regard to political right wing or left wing. Swedes are as a nation, as a people, anti-racists, but refuse to resign from racist expressions and attitudes since they are a reminiscence of the “People’s Home” now lost.¹

In similarity to my experience a few weeks earlier, the statements in this lecture lingered in my head for days, and I felt that the introduction of grief, melancholia, nostalgia and revaluation of the past added new questions to those above. How do these notions and phenomena contribute when cultural identity is produced? Is this process, and the role of

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¹ Tobias Hübinette och Catrin Lundström: "Om svenskheten och vitheten”, 20th Oct 2011, Mängkulturellt Centrum. The term ”People’s Home” ("Folkhemmet"), and the welfare state it refers to, is a creation of Swedish Social Democracy, and denotes the intimate relation between the free, modern citizen and the state.
these phenomena in it, different if the cultural identity in question is that of the majority population, or if it is that of a minority group? What impact has the notion of nationality and the nation state on this process? The lecture at Multicultural Centre also inspired me to investigate Swedish circumstances and cultural identities.

**Purpose**

The questions I pose, and aim to answer, in this dissertation, are:

- In what way can melancholia and grief be said to constitute a positive, in the sense *constructive*, part of cultural identity? Or: How can the process be described and analyzed, during which melancholia and grief is made a positive part of cultural identity?
- How is this process affected by discourses of power and the power of discourse?
- What are the connections between a cultural identity constituted as above, and the notions of *nationality, ethnicity, and cultural heritage*?
- What is the benefit and what is the risk, of making melancholia and grief positive parts of cultural identity?

What I wish to achieve, in terms of academic contribution, is partly to point out how applicable cross-disciplinary theoretical models about identity as social construction are when investigating issues concerning cultural identity, especially in a world based on national states and ethnical affiliation, and partly to highlight which consequences maintaining the notion of nationality have on culture identity formation. Further, I want to make it visible how the ways in which melancholia and grief are used as components in cultural identity differ depending on what your position in society is. I also hope that this study will contribute to a broader enlightenment that might affect the way future policies are developed regarding a wide-ranged field of identity-related issues in society, e.g. migration, education, cultural heritage management, etc.

**Method and material**

My method is qualitative, cross-disciplinary and hermeneutic. It has basically consisted of taking part of, and interpreting, descriptions of, and statements accounting for, cultural identity in literature, news papers, magazines, web pages, and other sources from the present and recent past. These have been in various forms, e.g. images, documentary material, essays, and news articles. Most text material, if not all, is originally in Swedish, and quotes from those sources have been translated to English by me to achieve readability and linguistic consistency. Coherence with the original in those cases is easily controlled by the reader through respective footnote, which contain the quote in question in Swedish.

As my objects of study, I have selected what I consider as two self-defined and contemporary Swedish cultural identities: Sámi, the indigenous people of northern Fenno-Scandia; and white Swedes, who are the majority population in today’s nation state of Sweden. I have chosen a number of sources where we find first-hand presentations
referring to cultural identity, made by individuals from each group. These presentations have I then interpreted in terms of how the narrative and performative concerning melancholia, grief, nostalgia, and reminiscence, are used in a psychoanalytical “scheme”, to form cultural identity, individual and collective. These notions and the theories behind them are more extensively accounted for below in the theoretical background section.

Demarcations

The demarcation most urgent to address, is the groups that I have chosen to investigate. Why did I choose these groups? Firstly, I felt that it was an important task to investigate the Swedish context, this for (at least) two reasons: 1) research on Swedish cultural identities from a cross-disciplinary perspective is not very extensive, but vital for understanding contemporary Swedish society; 2) it being my own context in many ways, contemporary Sweden is of both academic and personal interest to me, and investigating it this way is a means to better understand patterns I observe in academia and daily life. Secondly, I wish to make a comparative study of the phenomena I intend to investigate. Therefore, I have chosen to look closer at a small number of groups which can be assumed to share several common grounds, but also to differ in some significant aspects. In this case, the common grounds are living, and (to a large part) having been brought up, within the borders of today’s Sweden, speaking Swedish as a primary language, being familiar with, and handling without difficulty, the social and cultural codes of today’s Swedish society. The differences concern geographical orientation in cultural identity, socio-political status in Swedish society on different levels, and the degrees of power and influence executed by, and imposed on, the groups respectively.

My motifs for choosing these groups are based on my interest in issues concerning Sweden’s past that I consider unprocessed. Those issues are racism, colonialism and nationalism. Since they are yet to be processed both in general society and in academia, they still characterize contemporary discourses regarding heritage, culture, nationality, ethnicity, history, etc. in many ways. Like journalist and author Maja Hagerman, I believe that it is impossible to “free oneself from the ballast of the past until you become aware that it is there”.2

For example, Sámi people are often investigated as a “culture”. Items have been collected, narratives recorded. Archaeology, linguistics and genetics have been implied to sort out their ancestry and land claims (but have all failed in giving an answer to which Scandinavian group is related to which, and which one was here first). Swedishness as cultural identity, however, is rarely treated in Swedish discourses, in academia or elsewhere. Whiteness is rarely treated at all. Investigating Swedish whiteness, then, presents a special challenge that intrigues me, none the less since it is my own cultural identity. A comparison of these two cultural groups is very relevant, since they share a long history and a vast geographical area.

How do I myself define these groups? This is not very easily done, but basically I have taken as evidence for the existence of these groups as actual, self-denoted groups, that one finds first-hand presentations in media from individuals apparently identifying as “Sámi” or “white Swede”. The first of these two groups is the least difficult to define, since the Sámi, because of their status as a minority, have a more apparent need to define themselves. The discussion of what constitutes their cultural identity is out in the open, and often contains a strong element of pride. Sámi have, after centuries of oppression, started to revive Sámi languages and traditions, often with a strong emphasis on the connection to nature and Earth. Wearing traditional clothes on holidays and special events, singing joik, learning traditional crafts, or engaging in reindeer herding, are examples of how one’s Sámi identity can be reclaimed and strengthened. White Swedes are less prone to advertise their affiliation. The main reason is the status of constituting the majority population in the nation-state of Sweden. This, very safe, position makes it basically unnecessary to draw the outlines of one’s identity with distinct markers. The whiteness plays a vital role here as a site of safety: white Swedes, in contrast to e.g. black Swedes, can rest assured that their Swedishness won’t be questioned; unless they to a high degree deviate in behavior from what is conceived as “Swedish” behavior. Another reason is that it would in conflict with the “colorblind” culture of Swedish antiracism. However, the white Swedishness is in no way invisible or untold. It is simply hard to lay eyes on since it is everywhere in Swedish society.

The material I have used is delimited by my ambition to interpret, analyze and discuss the internal, individual processes of cultural, collective identity. It is through presentations of one’s own experiences of the Self and its place in the world that we can come as close as possible to those processes.

Skin color, ethnicity and nationality are inseparable when it comes to cultural identities in Sweden, which presents a lot of problems, especially so when groups are separated by historical narrative, social hierarchies, legislation and economic politics, and at the same time intertwined and irreversibly interconnected by historical realities, other social hierarchies, and other parts of legislation and economic politics. Issues concerning ethnicity, nationality, identity, heritage, etc., have a tendency to evoke strong feelings, since they can never be separated from history and society. Whenever these notions are used, they are used for a purpose, and one is absolutely right to always view them with a critical eye. Combined with melancholia, grief, nostalgia and revaluation of the past as cultural phenomena, these notions are also connected to racism, xenophobia, and chauvinism.

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3 Ingrid Sjökvist (ed.): *Jag är same*. Acta Bothniensia Occidentalis 31, Västerbottens läns hembygdsförbund, Umeå 2011. The book comprises fourteen interviews with people identifying as Sámi, with connections to the county of Västerbotten. Several of the interviewees in the book testify that their Sámi heritage was concealed for them during their childhood, and seen as something shameful.


5 Maja Hagerman’s ”Det rena landet” (”The Pure Country”) gives an excellent account of how whiteness became a significant, but ”invisible” feature of Swedishness.
sentiments and attitudes that have been boosted in Europe during the past two decades.\(^6\) This goes hand in hand with hostility and suspicion against general progressivity and reform perceived as threatening, e.g. increased equality between sexes. Although it is of great interest to investigate these connections, I have tried to not do that to any major extent in this dissertation. Partly so because I want to emphasize the performativity—psychoanalysis combination, and partly because that work is excellently executed by far more initiated scholars, such as Tobias Hübinette, Catrin Lundström and Mattias Gardell, and journalists as Magnus Linton.\(^7\)

**Theoretical framework and points of departure**

Cultural identity is a much debated concept, composed of two terms that have quite complex meanings themselves. According to a traditional view, inherited from the modern ideas about “peoples”, “ethnography”, and “culture”, emerging during the 19\(^{th}\) century, cultural identity is regarded to be a sort of unchanging collective “self”.\(^8\) In this view, it is built on a connection between ancestral relation to a given geographical place and a set of well-defined cultural patterns that has developed there. John Tomlinson tells the following, enchanting little tale, in his article about globalization and cultural identity:

> Once upon a time, before the era of globalization, there existed local, autonomous, distinct and well-defined, robust and culturally sustaining connections between geographical place and cultural experience. These connections constituted one’s – and one’s community’s – ‘cultural identity’. This identity was something people simply ‘had’ as an undisturbed existential possession, an inheritance, a benefit of traditional long dwelling, of continuity with the past. Identity, then, like language, was not just a description of cultural belonging; it was a sort of collective treasure of local communities. But it was also discovered to be something fragile that needed protecting and preserving, that could be lost.\(^9\)

Stuart Hall describes a similarly constructed idea of a collective “true self”, and claims this to be the first of, at least, two different ways of thinking about cultural identity. Under the layers of history and civilization, this “true self” provides us, as “one people”, with “stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning”.\(^10\)

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In this perspective, key notions of cultural identity are homeland, tradition, and ancestry. It is seen as vital that none of these notions are amiss, or modified, if the cultural identity is to be maintained. Perhaps J. W. Berry’s investigation of Aboriginal identity in Canada can be said to represent how this view is applied among scholars today. In his article ”Aboriginal Cultural Identity”, published 1999, the term cultural identity refers to “a complex set of features that together indicate how one thinks of oneself in relation to Aboriginal peoples”, including perception or belief of being Aboriginal, a sense of importance or attachment to an Aboriginal group or groups, positive or negative feelings about being Aboriginal, and degree of identity maintenance. Cultural identity, here, is a property that you can relate to as if it were an actual object, although composed of a “complex set of features”. You can hide it or display it, as you like, but it will always be there, unchanged, within you.

This view is problematic if one wants to apply a critical perspective, and also if one has a social justice agenda, looks for policy change and social change, since it is designed to study the culture of “the Other” from an allegedly neutral point of view. This is the position that, historically, white male scientists have reserved for themselves, where they can enjoy the privilege of appearing objective.

Terry Threadgold problematizes the lack of acknowledging one’s own privileged position, and its consequences for the conclusions one draw:

The knowledge class, it seems, has a fairly limited repertoire of available narratives despite its considerable cultural capital. Its members are not therefore very good at hearing other people's stories -- and that raises again questions of speech and silence, of legal categories which expect a 'unified' community and serve to construct and entrench processes of 'othering'.

Threadgold’s vision for the future of cultural studies is that it will continue soaking up influences from feminist studies and other critical perspectives, with an “understanding that the political is and cannot be other than personal, that we cannot separate ourselves from the embodied histories we have lived and the ‘ideologies’ which have branded and produced our bodies”:

This account cannot altogether dispense with the polarisation of black and white, men and women, us and them, the knowledge class and its others, but it can, I think, show how lines of difference are drawn through multiple sites of power. It can help us to understand how family and cultural memories, memories that are in the body, that the body performs and enacts on a daily basis, contribute to the making of culture, and how subjectivity is formed through gendered and radicalised difference. It is a different space in which to try to understand the networks that connect the body, the personal, the pedagogy, the political, the

policy and the popular in the making of this thing we call culture and in the doing of these things we call cultural policy studies and cultural studies.\textsuperscript{13}

Thanks to scholars like Threadgold, a more complex scholarly perspective on cultural identity emerged towards the end of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, with its roots in the post-colonial theory framework and the philosophical debates on identity. Mikael Kurkiala explains how the two terms identity and culture can be understood, (and note the differentiation between tradition and culture):

Identity, or identification, can be seen as the positioning of human subjects in relation to points of reference such as symbols, artifacts, places and “significant others”. Furthermore, identity varies contextually and over time; it is thus never fixed but should be seen as \textit{a process of becoming}.\textsuperscript{14}

The view taken here is that tradition is an objectification, a conscious model of past lifeways and practices employed more or less pragmatically. As such, tradition is of necessity an invention, i.e. a contemporary interpretation of a perceived past. Culture, on the other hand, is largely unconscious. […] Culture, in this view, does not consist of shared meanings, ideas, values, etc., but is rather the […] point from which different meanings are generated, […]. Whether objectified or not, the meanings generated in the process we call culture all serve to explicate who we are, want to be or should be. Culture is thus basically synonymous to identity construction.\textsuperscript{15}

This corresponds to the second of the, at least, two ways of thinking about cultural identity mentioned by Hall:

Cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in a mere 'recovery' of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past.\textsuperscript{16}

Hall admits that this second view on cultural identity can appear more problematic than the first, “This second view of cultural identity is much less familiar, and more unsettling. If identity does not proceed, in a straight, unbroken line, from some fixed origin, how are we to understand its formation?”\textsuperscript{17} I believe that a combination of performativity theories and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{13} Threadgold 1996.
\item \textsuperscript{15} Kurkiala 1998, p 44.
\item \textsuperscript{16} Hall 1989, p 225.
\item \textsuperscript{17} Hall 1989, p 226.
\end{itemize}
psychoanalysis might be fruitful here, since we are dealing with the processes of identity formation, and notions such as *melancholia, nostalgia, grief, loss, mourning*, which Freud and his followers have a lot to say about.

My perspective is strongly hermeneutic and I am definitely a follower of the “second” view on cultural identity. By hermeneutic, I refer to the notion that all our experiences of, and conclusions about, ourselves, others, and the world, are interpretations. Experience is never fixed, but is constantly changing and bringing new perspectives. These new perspectives call for new interpretations, and so on. Our relations to ourselves, others, and the world, thus describe a spiral-like movement, and never cease to change. Change, though, is never easy to accept, for several reasons. One of them is, as described in the quote below, a built-in resistance due to the fact that we can only fully encompass what is already part of our framework. Thus, to include new features and notions into our framework, we gradually have to work through them, in a manner not too dissimilar from the psychoanalytical process of working through described by Freud, which we will return to in short. Taking her departure in Judith Butler’s philosophical thinking, Annika Thiem offers one way to link the performativity approach with that of psychoanalysis:

Experiencing something as something always necessarily depends on a hermeneutic paradigm of that experience that makes it available as experience. Yet this paradigm is not simply a closed world-view in itself within which one is immersed and to which one is unalterably confined. Rather one always already experiences the limits and breakage points of one’s hermeneutic framework and while the limits and breakage points are experienced, they resist total sublation into reflective knowledge. This resistance depends on the fact that every paradigm works according to a certain foreclosure that occasions the preservation and return of that which cannot be signified within the given order of being. Experience as interpretation is thus a practice that depends on the code of intelligibility. Therefore, to become and be a person, one constantly and repeatedly has to practice oneself and form oneself and “is practiced” and formed through, within, and with regard to the norms of intelligibility.18

This description of hermeneutic experience fits very well in the arguments I will pursue in the following. The fact that we can only really experience what we already understand, and that we can only understand that which is already part of our framework, is one of my major standpoints. As a scientific method, it presupposes the subjectivity of the researcher, as well as that of the reader. It also demands well substantiated arguments and that the perspectives of the researcher are clearly accounted for. In this dissertation, the hermeneutic perspective is visible in (at least) two ways: 1) in the assumption that identity is an ongoing interpretive process in which one constantly produces and reproduces oneself; 2) in my method, which is to take part of first-hand presentations in media, such as literature, internet pages, and film, and interpret what I read, hear, and see.

Besides hermeneutics, one point of departure is in the notion of identity as performative, and also as performance and narrative. These terms might require some explanation. It is necessary to differentiate between the performative, which consists of unconscious acts, and the performance, which is strictly conscious. The narrative is the story we tell and make ourselves part of by verbal as well as non-verbal means, both on a conscious and an unconscious level. While performativity is the compulsory repetition of norms, performance and narrative can be seen as a deliberate producing and reproducing of norms. With every act in the process of identity making, (1) we tell the story we have chosen to be part of (narrative), (2) we perform in the way we feel is required to emphasize that story and make it more true (performance), but through our unconscious acts (3) we also tell a story that we often would not choose willingly (performative), e.g. the story of female subordination, or racism. Connecting this to Kurkiala’s account of cultural identity above, culture is typically part of the performative, while tradition would be a performance. The one major theorist when it comes to performativity is Judith Butler, who has developed and applied theories of performativity within the field of gender studies. A few titles that may be familiar to the reader are “Gender Trouble”, “Undoing Gender”, and “Bodies that Matter”. Butler’s far-reaching notion of gender as a social construction is applicable to all aspects of identity; ethnical, racial, national, cultural, sexual, professional, etc.

Another prominent person within the field of identity studies is Michel Foucault, with his writings about the Self. Speaking of hermeneutics, one of his conclusions is that a defining act of the Self is the transgression of limits in order to experience oneself. Transgression not only involves the limits of the Self, but in a sense creates them, and so affirms that the Self do exist.

Foucault “found much in our self-understanding that is not voluntary and consciously chosen, even though to term it involuntary would miss the extent to which we constitute our identities by conforming ourselves to tacitly understood practices and generally accepted norms. […] When understood in this way, self-understanding is not a matter of autonomous decision, or of knowing the essential nature of one’s natural self, but a matrix of social and discursive practices that vary historically, just as self-understanding does.”

Paul Ricoeur is another noteworthy name in this field, occupying himself with how the Self relates to, and depends on, the Other. He has also investigated the historical narrative built on the presence or absence of memory. As I interpret the following quote, the Self is

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a narrative, partly deriving from and directed towards the Other, and its building material and the condition for its consistency over time is memory:

In its declarative phase, memory enters into the region of language; memories spoken of, pronounced are already a kind of discourse that the subject engages in with herself. What is pronounced in this discourse occurs in the common language, most often in the mother tongue, which, it must be said, is the language of others.

[...]

Each of us bears a name that we have not given to ourselves, but have received from another: in our culture, this is a patronym that situates me along a line of filiation, and a given name that distinguishes me from my siblings. This world of the other, placed upon an entire life, at the price of the difficulties and the conflicts we are familiar with, confers a linguistic support, a decidedly self-referential turn, to all the operations of personal appropriation gravitating around the mnemonic nucleus.  

Thiem contributes to the discourse on identity, weaving together Foucault’s theories of self, Butler’s theories of performativity and “Paul Ricoeur’s theory of emplotment, understanding it as “narrative performativity,” a narrative reflexivity that brings about the subject as understanding itself as extended over time.”

Departing somewhat from Butler and Foucault we can now consider that this formation [of the self] works through interior reflection and at the same through “intersubjective interaction,” and this formative process with its two aspects always has a diachronic as well as synchronic dimension, or, put it another way, the synchronic situation is always a situation extended over time. Time as lived time or human time is always fabricated. The aspect of lived time is constitutive for the emerging as someone who has a concept of oneself as oneself. This formation of a self-concept can be understood as emplotment.

[...]

The process of being formed as and forming a reflective relation with oneself through emplotment is governed by the triple-dialectic of intrasubjective and intersubjective, of diachronic and synchronic as well as of unconscious and conscious. Imaginative remembering then is captured as a differential that constitutes human potentiality, rather than as a property inherent to a subject. The form of this human potentiality is that of always already being entangled in stories, but these stories are permanently only partially unfolded, and how they unfold in a given situation is never predeterminable. One inevitably is entangled in a plurality of stories in both directions of past and future, and neither past nor future is ever brought to the point of full closure.

*Psychoanalysis*

Our second point of departure will be psychoanalysis. This branch of psychological theory and method is dominated by the thoughts of Sigmund Freud, the founding spirit, but there is also ongoing work to adapt it to contemporary psychology and society. In order to get
more acquainted with psychoanalysis, and to collect useful material for this dissertation, I attended a three-day symposium addressing the political aspects of loss, trauma and mourning from a psychoanalytical perspective.26

During the symposium, Sigmund Freud, the front figure of psychoanalysis, was of course quoted with his conclusions on the nature of mourning and melancholia: “Mourning is regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which have taken the place of one, such as one’s country, liberty, an ideal, and so on. In some people the same influences produce melancholia instead of mourning and we consequently suspect them of a pathological disposition.”27

He defines mourning as a step-by-step process of letting go: “Each single one of the memories and expectations in which the libido is bound to the object is brought up and hyper-cathected, and detachment of the libido is accomplished in respect of it.”28

This process is hard and painful, of course, and will meet resistance. The resistance is rarely recognized as such, and often takes the form of obsessive behaviors and thinking patterns, as described in the essay Remembering, Repeating and Working-through:

> We have learnt that the patient repeats instead of remembering, and repeats under the conditions of resistance. […] he repeats everything that has already made its way from the sources of the repressed into his manifest personality — his inhibitions and unserviceable attitudes and his pathological character-traits.29

Thus can it happen that he does not properly know under what conditions his phobia breaks out or does not listen to the precise wording of obsessional ideas or does not grasp the actual purpose of his obsessional impulses.30

The first step in overcoming the resistances is made, as we know, by the analyst’s uncovering the resistance, which is never recognized by the patient, and acquainting him with it. […] one must allow the patient time to become more conversant with the resistance with which he has now become acquainted, to work through it, to overcome it, […]31

To mourn is to accept the loss, to let go. The unwillingness to mourn is an attempt to maintain the love object. These processes are often identified with ease when the love object is a deceased person, but less transparent when it is something abstract, like an ideology, identity, nation, or religious belief system. It rather seems to be common sense to defend those kinds of abstractions against change, seemingly a threat to their very existence. An ideal, true, identity is perceived as a static condition, and the ideal world to

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28 Freud 1957, p 245.
30 Freud 1958, p 152.
31 Freud 1958, p 155.
live in always remains the same. If one does not have the perception of identity as something compulsive, yet ever-changing, then the only conceivable result of letting go of it would be the emergence of an empty space within oneself, or, perhaps worse, the emergence of an identity one doesn’t recognize, that isn’t Oneself anymore. Either way, one would seize to exist. Here, the unwillingness to move on and gradually become different, because of fear of seizing to exist, contradicts the strife of the Self to exceed its limits in order to affirm its existence.

In the call for papers for the symposium mentioned above, melancholia as a tie between communities and as operator in seemingly cultural, social, political or individual agendas is emphasized, and Dominick LaCapra quoted: “Loss, when conflated with absence is often called to operate in power discourses. The full unity and homogeneity of the body politic is often posited as lost, disrupted or polluted by others.”

Paul Ricoeur also provides a clue as to how psychoanalysis can be implemented when we want to investigate cultural identity. He states that mourning and melancholia are inseparable, and that the first always moves towards the other. This is significant in his following reflection on “the pathology of collective memory”:

It is the bipolar constitution of personal and community identity that, ultimately, justifies extending the Freudian analysis of mourning to the traumatism of collective identity. We can speak not only in an analogical sense but in terms of a direct analysis of collective traumatisms, of wounds of collective memory. The notion of the lost object finds a direct application in the “losses” that affect the power, territory, and populations that constitute the substance of a state.

The love object is here the nation state and all that it builds upon. For a nationalist, it takes the place of a primary love object, a “Mother”. The nation state exists under the pretense of mutual origin: it has “given birth” to its subjects, but the subjects must also continually produce and reproduce the nation state through acts displaying loyalty; and dependence: the subjects need the nation state in order to be safe, it is their only home, and it promises to last forever, but, alas, to do so it must be protected, for it cannot defend itself against enemies and change, that must be done by the subjects. To defend the nation against enemies is the ultimate act of loyalty, especially if one actually dies doing it. This is why war memorials are so important. Violence is fundamental to the existence of the nation state, operating as a maintaining act, and it is utterly melancholic.

What we celebrate under the title of founding events are, essentially, acts of violence legitimated after the fact by a precarious state of right. What was glory for some was humiliation for others. To celebration on one side corresponds execration on the other. In this way, symbolic wounds calling for healing are stored in the archives of the collective

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34 Ricoeur 2004, p 78.
memory. More precisely, what, in historical experience, takes the form of a paradox — namely, too much memory here, not enough memory there — can be reinterpreted in terms of the categories of resistance and compulsion to repeat, and, finally, can be found to undergo the ordeal of the difficult work of remembering. Too much memory recalls especially the compulsion to repeat, which, Freud said, leads us to substitute acting out for the recollection by which the present would be reconciled with the past: how much violence in the world stands as acting out “in place” of remembering!35

But not only nationalists suffer from this distortion of memory, so do those who refrain from patriotic gestures and criticize warfare:

If this be the case, then too little memory belongs to the same reinterpretation, what some cultivate with morose delection, and what others flee with bad conscience, is [...] repetition-memory. The former love to lose themselves in it, the latter are afraid of being engulfed by it. But both suffer from the same lack of criticism. They do not attain what Freud termed the work of remembering.36

Denying the importance of nationality and ethnicity does not make a racist past go away. Doing so is but the other side of a coin, and the boundaries between “Us” and “Them” will remain intact.

The pathology of nationalism stretches even further. Reading Eileen McGinley, it is disturbingly obvious that nationalism, as the rise and maintenance of the nation state, not only is melancholic, but also has a correlation to pathological narcissism:

Where anxieties about dependency become severe, they may find expression not so much in individuals’ withdrawal from social relationships, but rather in massive projections by individuals into group identities, on which are conferred a fantasied strength which individuals and families are felt to lack. A narcissistic illusion of strength and self-sufficiency is created when an imaginary group identity can be constructed and sustained by antagonism to other groups which can be defined as enemies, as rivals within a competitive struggle (for local territory or jobs), or as inferiors into whom unbearable anxieties can be dumped by projective identification. These two forms of narcissistic defence can and often are combined.

It is within this spectrum we find neo-Nazism, islamophobia, anti-Semitism, and other phenomena of the like. A group representing “the Other” is appointed as scape-goats (Jews, Muslims, homosexuals, etc.) that must be removed from the body politic to keep it clean, healthy and intact. Those who “should” be loyal to the nation state, but for some reason won’t participate in the urgent rescue of it, are viewed as traitors (feminists, socialists, cosmopolites, etc.).37 These reactions are not spurred by a sense of safety, reciprocity and loyalty, but of a sense of immediate threat and violated trust:

35 Ricoeur 2004, p 79.
36 Ricoeur 2004, p 79.
It seems to be when the elementary foundations of trust in others and in the wider society become eroded that pathological identifications of a narcissistic type come into existence. 
[…]
It is where existing forms of dependence and relationship are perceived to have failed, and groups face declining rather than rising opportunities, that defences of a collective narcissistic kind are most often resorted to.\textsuperscript{38}

“Känn dig själv!” (“Know yourself!”)

Nordic Museum’s motto

“Känn dig själv, din släkt, ditt folk!” (“Know yourself, your kin, your people!”)

People Types exhibition’s motto

MELANCHOLIA IN SWEDISH CULTURAL IDENTITY FORMATION

The Swedish context

One melancholic condition that occurs in contemporary Swedish cultural identities is nostalgia (Greek: nostos=home; algos=pain) which resembles physical phantom pain:

Nostalgia is memories from, and a longing for, what one has left behind represented by the home or the homeland, an emotion that originates from separation and is about longing for something within one’s own life story that has been lost; the past mirrored through the contemporary.41

Nostalgia is a bit like homesickness, only that there is no home to return to, which causes grief and turns longing into an incurable pain. This pain can be eased by remembering and working through, which is also the same as letting go and accepting the loss.

But what if there is nothing to remember? What if the traces and images of home and of that which was before have been eradicated, and that which is left is blurred and distorted? And what if you have been denied your language, the very words with which you acknowledge the former existence of what is lost?

And what if it is the other way around: you never left “home”, you never lost the connection, you were never denied your past; where does grief and nostalgia come from? What loss are you supposed to work through and accept in order to move on? And exactly what are you to move on to?

The two cultural identities in this study, Sámi and white Swedes, are each related to one of the conditions above. Both these conditions can be partly explained by the widespread...

39 The adage ”Know yourself” (”Gnothi seauton”) originates from ancient Greek wisdom culture, and has been an ideal with varying implementations throughout history.

40 The People Types exhibition in Stockholm 1919 was an initiative by the Swedish Society for Eugenics that propagated the founding of an institute for racial studies. Their demand was hearkened, and in 1922 the State Institute for Racial Biology was established in Uppsala. Its first head was the SSFE member Herman Lundborg.

and “scientific” racism that characterized Swedish society from the end of the 19th century onwards. Swedish institutions and Swedish society as a whole have not until this day settled that past. But part of the explanation lies in the fact that Sweden not only was a racist society then — despite all anti-racist efforts and rhetoric, it is a racist society today.42

The feelings of melancholia and nostalgia operating in Sámi cultural identity and white Swedish cultural identity respectively come from totally different sources. The Sámi grief originates in actual trauma caused by exploitation, racism, colonialism and oppression, while the white Swedish grief comes from a fear of losing privileges. In nationalistic rhetoric, the white melancholia is often compared to the feelings of colonialized people, which is meant to cover up a power imbalance fundamental to the nation state of Sweden, in fact fundamental to the nation state as institution.43 This asymmetry is part of the modern, where scientific categorizing has made inequalities seem like common sense. Modernity and enlightenment are essentially white, male projects, and that has been demonstrated, with more than necessary clarity, by colonialism, slave trade, forced migrations, institutional racism, etc.44 Being born in Sweden means being born into the modern heritage and having one’s identity marked by the white, male hegemony. For Sámi, the experiences following this fact are very different than the experiences of white Swedes.

To prove my point, I will give you the following example.

One of the most visited sights in Stockholm is Skansen, appreciated for its picturesque manufacture of daily life in the old days. Among farmsteads from Dalarna and Skåne, churches and mansions, Hazelius placed a Sámi settlement. But, however popular it is among the inhabitants of Stockholm and tourists from the rest of Sweden and the world, Skansen was not meant to address Sámi, immigrants from Somalia, Japanese tourists, or the children and grandchildren of Turkish labor immigrants. It was founded with the purpose to teach white Swedes about their heritage:

Skansen has got many distinguished successors out in the world, but the institution is unique through its live program in the farms that mirrors the specific traditions in separate parts of the country. Here, the visitors can have a vision of how our ancestors lived, and a meaningful contact with the past.

But Hazelius wanted more than just an outdoor museum. He wanted to create a symbiosis of culture and nature, an environment where millions of Swedes could experience their ancestors’ farming efforts by means of nature’s forces, but also in combat with them. That is one of the motifs for giving the Nordic wild animals a place at Skansen.45

If the wild animals are there to represent the Swedish struggle against nature, one can wonder what the Sámi settlement was supposed to represent, being neither farmers nor animals. In the light of the budding racial biology around 1891 it seems quite obvious: the Sámi in Skansen are there to represent “the Other”, their purpose is to contrast against the white norm to make it shine even brighter. This is further emphasized by the fact that this particular milieu was not completed with puppets — instead, Hazelius had a Sámi family moved to his settlement, reindeer, dogs, and all, to live there as live pedagogy tools. They were reduced to less than human; they were objects to be studied for the benefit of the Swedish national spirit. Hand in hand goes the racialization of the Sámi and the elevation of the white Swede.

While the idea of a unified people made its triumphal march through continental Europe and in Stockholm, a very different story took place farther north. Since the 17th century, Swedes had been urged by the state to move to Norrland and settle there, and this developed into a large-scale colonization around 1800, when the state started handing out land to settlers. Towards the end of the 18th century, as nationalism became a bigger influence in European politics and the shapes of the modern nation states were chiseled out, the Sámi populations found themselves divided between four countries, whose borders were closing up quickly. The nomadic customs of taking one’s reindeer between different pastures became potentially criminal. These restrictions of mobility caused economic and demographic crises, as people felt compelled to either slaughter a large number of reindeer, or move to a different region.

Many of the settlers during the 19th century were actually Sámi trying to claim the land they already inhabited, or trying to find additional subsistence besides reindeer herding. Farming was the intended sustenance when the Swedish government initially started encouraging a large scale colonization of Norrland, but instead forestry became a big industry, swiftly taken over by the state, employing many of the immigrant settlers. In the end, both Swedes and Sámi, reindeer herders or not, were steamrollered by the Swedish state protecting its economic interests. Today, in issues concerning land owning and land use, Sámi is pitted against Sámi, Swede against Swede, and the two groups against each other. Svante Isaksson gives an initiated account of the political as well as the daily life conflicts that are part of the cultural heritage in Norrland, in his book “No Peace in the Mountains” (Ingen frid i fjällen”).

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få en vision av hur våra förfäder levde och en meningsfull kontakt med det förgågna. Men Hazelius ville något mer än bara ett friluftsmuseum. Han ville skapa en symbios av kultur och natur, en miljö där miljoner svenskar kunde uppleva sina förfäders odlingsmöda med hjälp av naturens krafter men också i kamp med dem. Det är ett av motiven till att Nordens vilda djur också fått en plats på Skansen.)

46 Hagerman 2006, p 328—329.
47 Nåt!
49 Isaksson 1999, p 93—94.
51 Isaksson 1999.
Sweden is often characterized as a multicultural society. From that one gets the impression that a variety of groups of people, with different cultural expressions, live side by side on fairly equal terms. But the truth is that differences are smoothed over at the expense of equality and tolerance. In theory, everyone is welcome into the warmth, but when actual injustice is pointed out, the praxis is — shoot the messenger! This fact is pointed out by Hübinette and Tigervall in their book about international adoptees in Sweden, where many adopters and adoptees testify to their reluctance to “raise the dust” over harassments and discrimination.\(^{52}\) Avoiding conflict has been a key feature of the Swedish society at least since the Swedish Employers’ Federation and the Social Democratic Union Confederation signed the epic Memorandum of Understanding at Saltsjöbaden in 1938. This agreement served the purpose of creating stability on the labor market, and stop wildcat strikes that threatened the production.\(^{53}\) Sweden went from poverty to economic growth, and conformity became the signature of the “People’s Home”. But the conformity of the successful urban life in modern Sweden can trace its roots even further back in time, to the era when the national consciousness was evoked in the Swedish people by means of racial biology and reinvention of the Viking.\(^{54}\)

Sweden of today, besides conformist, a very individualistic society, where family bonds have been replaced by the more “objective” and “sensible” bond to the state.\(^{55}\) The reasons for this strong individualism and pursuit of independence can be traced back to the romantic image that emerged during the 19\(^{th}\) century, of the Germanic people who resisted the Roman Empire.\(^{56}\) This reconstruction of an ancient free and proto-democratic past found its way, via Viking-romanticism and racial biology, into the modern era, where it coupled with influences from the American Dream (excluding the elements family and God), to give birth to the success story of the welfare state.\(^{57}\) As easy as flipping a coin, the national romantic race nostalgia was swept under the carpet and replaced with a spirit of extraordinarily high moral standards, hospitality and anti-racism.\(^{58}\) It did not take more than a couple of decades, however, before the varnish started to crack. The last three decades of neo-liberalism has cut many of the strings attaching the individual to the state, and the disclosure of the continuance of eugenic projects like forced sterilizations has harmed peoples’ trust in the welfare state.\(^{59}\) The uncomfortable truth that, at the threshold of the

\(^{52}\) Hübinette and Tigervall 2008, pp 221—228.


\(^{54}\) Hagerman 2006, pp 398—404. For further reading on the matter of Viking romanticism and Germanic or Nordic identity, both now and then, one can turn to the anthology ”Myten om det nordiska. Mellan romantik och politik”, Vägar till Midgård, Vol. 1, Lund 2001.


\(^{56}\) Hagerman 2006, pp 127—136, 139—144.


\(^{58}\) Hübinette and Lundström 2011, p 2.

21st century, many other countries rank higher than Sweden regarding issues that are part of the Swedish brand is coming as a shock and a hurting insult. Post WWII Sweden suffers severely from Ricoeur’s “too little memory”, and has a lot to work through.

Sámi

“The racial scientists
Measure heads
Order the people
To get undressed

Naked
In front of strangers
A merciless ignoring

The photographs show
A cruel oppression
In the name of research
Everything is permitted

The hidden racism”

“The Picture of Grandmother” (“Bilden av farmor”) is a video work at the Nordic museum’s Sápmi exhibition. The picture in question is displayed in a showcase beside the video monitor. The caption reads: “‘Grandmother Inga together with her siblings and her mother. Photo Eugenics collection © Uppsala University Library’

Inga was the grandmother of Lis-Mari Hjortfors, who appears in the video, telling about her feelings concerning the photo: “I thought that it was an ordinary family photo. Grandmother, her mother and her siblings look straight at the camera. They look grave. The picture was taken by the Institute for Racial Biology in Uppsala. My grandmother, photographed for racial biology research.”


63 Nordic museum, Sápmi exhibition. My translation ("Farmor Inga tillsammans med sina syskon och sin mamma. Foto Rasbiologiska samlingen © Uppsala Universitetsbibliotek").

Hjortfors continues by telling that it seems so typical that the Sámi always have been subject to examination, and she feels that she and her family have been violated by the researchers, and by the research in itself. But what she thinks is about the worst of all is that it took place in Sweden. To her, racial biology occurred in Hitler’s Germany. “We Swedes”, Hjortfors says, “I thought that we in Sweden knew better. […] It is perhaps a bit naïve to say that.” It is significant that this causes such a strong reaction. Maria Axelsson testify to similar feelings in the book “I am Sámi” (Jag är same”). They both identify so strongly with the image of Sweden as morally superior.

The story of Hjortfors’ grandmother as a research object was part of a forgotten history, hidden in the archives, but it still makes an impact: “[…] when one has violated other persons — why, it lives on for generations, but doesn’t show in the big, whole history. All the sad and black things, it disappears in the roar somehow.”

Outside the booth where the video work is displayed, are a few plates with other quotes concerning Sámi identity. Lotta Willborg Stoor says: “Is it that which is the Sámi? Being interviewed?” Even though the exhibition tries to question the old order of “Us” and “Them”, by involving people identifying as Sámi, the effect is still a culturalization, which causes discomfort in Stoor. This is a cultural heritage from the experiences as research object. The sadness and blackness deriving from violations still echo in those who were not even born when the racial biologists took their photos.

Maria Axelsson again:

“As a ten year old I read “The Diary of Anne Frank”. I was very taken by Anne’s and her Jewish family’s attempts to hide from the Nazis. I sat in my pink girl’s room back in the townhouse in Umeå and cried. The thought that hit was so horrible. Next time there is a war and the Nazis come, it is us Sámi they come to get. Nobody had ever said anything to me that should make me feel that way, but still I knew.”

Today, Sweden’s official policy towards the Sámi is less degrading. Sámi now count among the acknowledged national minorities, which renders them right to language
education and safeguarding their culture. They are also covered by a special Sámi policy due to their status as indigenous people.\textsuperscript{70}

The Swedish government has a promising attitude concerning the general knowledge of minority groups and their rights in society:

It is important that all children in Sweden gains knowledge about the history of the national minorities as well as about their culture, language and religion. That is why it is included in the teaching plan of the school that knowledge should be given about the national minorities and the minority languages.\textsuperscript{71}

“All children” would include also Sámi children. What image of themselves do they meet when they open their school books? Antti Ylikiiskilä has done a survey of educational materials for children and youths in high school and secondary school in Sweden:

In 22 out of 30 examined books, there is no mention of Sámi [language] or Sámi [people], and in 8 schoolbooks, 6 textbooks in Swedish and 2 textbooks in history something is retrieved. In one of those schoolbooks, \textit{Källan Svenska för gymnasieskolan, kurs A och B}, an exemplary description of the Sámi is given: their language, history and culture is amply described. In 7 out of 8 schoolbooks in history for the later stage of primary school the Sámi are not described at all.\textsuperscript{72}

In the material with Sámi content, they are pictured as victims of colonization. Their lives circulate around reindeer, mountains, and snow/winter. The illustrations of the books enhance the conception of the Sámi as the mysterious Other: “The image that protrudes in the illustrations is traditional, i.e. colorful clothing (gákti), mountains, winter, snow, Noaidi, troll drum and reindeer. The exotic image of the Sámi that earlier research has found remains.”\textsuperscript{73}

This image is also cherished by many identifying as Sámi. One example is Laila Spik, Sámi cultural worker, who on her homepage emphasizes the connections to nature and Earth.\textsuperscript{74} The page’s background is a mountain landscape covered in snow, and the page

\textsuperscript{70} Nationella minoriteter och minoritetsspråk: En sammanfattning av regeringens minoritetspolitik. Fact sheet from the Cabinet Office (Regeringskansliet) 2007, http://www.regeringen.se/content/1/c6/08/56/33/2fe839be.pdf
\textsuperscript{71} Nationella minoriteter och minoritetsspråk: En sammanfattning av regeringens minoritetspolitik 2007, my translation (“Det är viktigt att alla barn i Sverige får kunskap om de nationella minoriteternas historia samt om deras kultur, språk och religion. Därför ingår det i skolans läroplaner att kunskap ska ges om de nationella minoriteterna och minoritetsspråken”).
\textsuperscript{73} Ylikiiskilä 2006, my translation (“Den bild som framträder i illustrationerna är traditionell, dvs. färggranna dräkter (kolt), fjäll, vinter, snö, nädj, trolltrumma och renar. Den exotiska bild av samerna som tidigare forskning funnit kvarstår”). The Noaidi is the Sámi equivalent to a shaman.
\textsuperscript{74} Laila Spiks hemsida – samisk kulturarbetare, http://lailaspik.vingar.se/.
presents Spik’s activities concerning nature medicine and traditional Sámi knowledge. Many of the interviewees in “I am Sámi” (“Jag är same”) also testify to their close connection to nature and its forces as being something typical Sámi.75

And there is really no alternate image to balance it. Actual knowledge about the long history and cultural variations of Sámi presence in Sweden is scarce, even among Sámi themselves. The long history of colonization and nationalistic narratives has not been kind to the subtle cultural environments that characterize Sápmi, nor to the traditional knowledge surrounding them, and a lot has fallen into oblivion.76

During the most intense decades of Swedish nation-building, the Sámi were subjected to an increasingly strict categorization, according to the “Lapp shall be Lapp”-policy. This policy caused a shattering of the Sámi, forcing some of them to live a nomadic life with little access to modern conveniences and education, while others were forced to become “Swedish” and abandon their language and traditional way of life. Only reindeer herders were considered “true” Lapps, and not all reindeer herders for that matter; the reindeer owners among forest Sámi were seen as a degenerated hybrid of Sámi and Swede.77 This led to a breakage in the transfer and exchange of cultural codes and influences between individuals and groups, and had a major impact on the formation of identity. The “Lapp shall be Lapp”-policy assumed that the Sámi were culture on the verge of extinction, and it became quite self-fulfilling.

Maria Axelsson reflects on the silences that has marked her pursuit of a Sámi cultural identity:

“I studied Sámi world views and religion and Sámi history. I searched the Research Archive at Umeå university and I asked old relatives to tell. Slowly I puzzled the pieces together about my family’s history. I realized that my upbringing had been surrounded by critical silences regarding certain significant issues. There were things that no one had told, pieces missing. We were not just glad that we were Sámi, even though we were too, at least when talking aloud about it. But in the silence something else was hidden. A big grief, and a trauma.”78

Sara Ranta-Rönnlund published a number of books during the 1970’s, containing life-stories from the Sámi community of the early 1900s. In the preface to “Sons of Njoalpa” (Njoalpas söner”), she discusses the issue of general identification among Sámi during her

75 Jag är same 2011, pp 15―16, 28, 53, 67, 94.
childhood and youth: “I have asked myself if we considered all Lapps as kinsmen and felt a special fellowship with them. Actually, I find it hard to answer that question myself.”

The differences in clothing, accent and even in wealth were obvious to her, sometimes more obvious than the similarities. There seems to have been little, or no, contact or exchange between Sámi groups in different regions of Sweden:

We knew well enough, that there were Lapps also further south, e.g. in Jokkmokk, and we also understood their language, but we noticed that they, unlike us, could not speak Finnish, but on the other hand were very good at the Swedish language. [...] Once in a while, one of the Lapps from Arvidsjaur strayed up to our regions. One could yet understand their language, but their clothing had not much similarity with ours. From priests, explorers and other scholarly men we also learned that there was supposed to be Lapps far further south in Sweden, yes, even down in Östersund, but what such animals looked like not many of us knew, and if one ever came across such a creature, one preferred to speak Swedish with them, if one could.

This fragmentation led to a weak connection with the past, and lack of knowledge about the varying conditions that Sámi groups have lived under for as long as there have been records of them. Some knowledge came from white Swedish scholars, and displays the image that the Swedish nation state has painted of the Sámi. Despite being aware that Sámi were spread over an almost ungraspable area, displaying a number of distinguishing features, Ranta-Rönnlund gives the following explanation of the occurrence of other Sámi lifeways beside reindeer husbandry:

Most Lapps were reindeer herders, but there were also those who had turned into fishing Lapps or forest Lapps. A fishing Lapp was one that had lost his/her reindeer and settled by some lake in a permanent hut or a cottage and subsisted on fishing and usually hunting and Lapp handicraft. Forest Lapps were those who had left the nomadic and become landowning farmers but who often passed on the Lappish reindeer herding tradition and had their own reindeer herds that could be quite large.


80 Sara Ranta-Rönnlund 1973, p 8—9. My translation (Nog visste vi, att det fanns lappar också längre söderut, t.ex. i Jokkmokk, och vi förstod även deras språk, men vi lade märke till, att de inte som vi kunde tala finska, men däremot var mycket duktiga i det svenska språket. [...] Någon gång förirrade sig också någon av lapparna från Arvidsjaur upp till våra områden. Deras språk kunde man ännu förstå, även om det skilde sig ganska kraftigt från vårt, men deras klädsel hade inte mycket likhet med vår. Av präster, forskningsresande och andra lärda män hörde vi väl också talas om att det skulle finnas lappar mycket längre söderut i Sverige, ja ända nere i Östersund, men hur sådana djur såg ut var det inte många bland oss som visste, och om man någon gång kom i kontakt med en sådan varelse, så föredrog man att tala svenska med den, om man nu kunde.)

81 Sara Ranta-Rönnlund 1973, p 8—9. My translation (De flesta lapparna var renskötare, men det fanns också de som hade förvandlats till fiskarlappar eller till skogsllappar. En fiskarlapp var en som hade förlorat sina renar och slagit sig ned vid någon sjö i en fast käta eller en stuga och livnärde sig på fiske och oftast jakt samt lappslöjd. Skogsllappar var de som hade lämnat nomadiserandet och blivit jordägande bönder men som ofta förde den lapska renskötartraditionen vidare och hade egna renhjordar, som kunde vara ganska stora.)
In the 21st century, the sense of having something in common has increased within the Sámi societies, but the strong emphasis on reindeer herding remains.

Johan Mära denotes himself Sámi, and feels as if he has a divided citizenship. Swedish as he is, he also feels a fellowship with Sámi from Siberia, Norway and Finland, across the language barriers. The interest among young people for Sámi language, handicraft and joik pleases him. What concerns him about the continuity of Sámi culture is the threatened position of the reindeer husbandry, which is “an important pillar in the whole Sámi culture […]. If it withers part of the stability of Sámi community, lifestyle and culture form disappears. Even the permanent settlers depend on reindeer herding. In it lies the explanation and origin of the food, the language, the clothing and the joik. And of course, the storytelling.”

However, reindeer husbandry is not the unifying medium of cultural identity continuum that many would like to deem it, partly because it contains few traditional elements except the migration in itself and has grown into a big industry, and partly because so many of those who identify, and are officially “approved”, as Sámi, are excluded from it. Because of the rigid and basically racist structure of the Swedish Reindeer Husbandry Act, the reindeer owners and their organization units, the Sámi villages, possess a lot of influence in all issues concerning the Sámi population in Sweden. To the Swedish state it is most important to exert some control over the c. 30% of Sweden’s surface area that is affected by reindeer husbandry. The interests of the percentage of the Sámi population that have no reindeer are simply assumed to be in line with the interests of those who do.

There are many testimonies on the consequences the policy and legislation has on the lives of people who try to maintain a connection to their Sámi heritage in the “wrong” way. Kalle Hansson worked hard as a “Lapp-laborer” during the 1970’s and 80’s, in order to be included in the hunting and fishing rights belonging to the Sámi village. He also had hopes that it would pay off as a membership in the Sámi village, but when he applied he got the answer that they were not “to have any summer children here”.

Lorentz Sjulsson says that he started to care more about his Sámi heritage when he took over one of the two reindeer marks that his family possessed:

“I have my roots in Vapsten, almost all of them, so applied for membership in the Sámi village. But the county administration and the Sámi village said no. by then we had moved up to our property in Björkvatnet, with the intention to build a reindeer herd in order to live off reindeer husbandry. I thought that it would work out, I had my reindeer mark and the family has lived in the area and conducted reindeer husbandry for ages. But since we were

84 Isaksson 1999, p 34—44.
86 Isaksson 1999, p 48—49.
87 Isaksson 1999, p 50.
not accepted in the Sámi village, we did not get access to the pastures and could not participate in the migrations. [...] Neither could I fish freely; the fishing and hunting rights come with the belonging to the Sámi village. If I wanted to fish I had to acquire a fishing card and stand on the hut land of my ancestors together with tourists with my rod. It did not feel good at all.\(^88\)

Maintaining the stereotyped image of the Sámi as a child of nature, living on nature’s terms and leading a nomadic life in the company of the wind and the migrating reindeer is a tempting route when navigating the territory of cultural identity formation, but it also leads to continued “othering”. In line with the hermeneutic experience of becoming oneself, there is always resistance against change within a cultural group, and there are always those who move towards, and cross, the boundaries of the collective cultural identity. This is, as stated above, a compulsory process; we cannot seize to be, and being is a process of continuous becoming. When identifying as Sámi, this process is governed to a large part by racist and nationalist discourses prevailing during the last 200 years, which, on one hand, demand assimilation, on the other hand demand “authenticity”.

According to David Eng and Shinhee Han, the process of assimilation is “a negotiation between mourning and melancholia. The ethnic subject does not inhabit one or the other—mourning or melancholia—but mourning and melancholia coexist at once in the process of assimilation. This continuum between mourning and melancholia allows us to understand the negotiation of racial melancholia as conflict rather than damage.”\(^89\)

Encompassing the model minority stereotype is a strategy that enables assimilation into the national fabric, but at the same time it hinders reconciliation with the past, as it facilitates the kind of amnesia required for national cohesion.\(^90\) The Swedish nation state is founded upon a mythology of democracy, openness and equality, and in order to stay intact, alternate versions of history must be “forgotten”. This means that the mimicry of the model minority stereotype is the only way to be that will be accepted by mainstream society, but it also entails a distance from the ideals of the nation.\(^91\) This ambivalence is highly melancholic, but in this context not in a pathological sense. For the Sámi, melancholia has become “a depathologized structure of everyday group experience”.\(^92\)

Liselotte Wajstedt has gained some attention for her documentation of her own search for a Sámi identity. As a young adult she started to take a strong interest in her mother’s Sámi heritage. She had never been a part of a Sámi community, or involved in any traditional practices: “For me has the Sámi [identity] never been something natural, but there was a strong longing to be one of “them””.\(^93\) The quest for a Sámi identity turned into

\(^{88}\) Jag är same 2011, p 41—42.

\(^{89}\) Eng and Han 2000, p 693.

\(^{90}\) David Eng and Shinhee Han: "A Dialogue on Racial Melancholia", Psychoanalytic Dialogues, 10: 4, 2000, p 667, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10481881009348576

\(^{91}\) Eng and Han 2000, p 677.


\(^{93}\) Elin-Anna Labba: "Same på sitt eget sätt", DN, 8 Feb 2008, my translation ("För mig har det samiska aldrig varit naturligt, men det fanns en stark längtan att vara en av "dom").
the documentary movie “Sámi nieida jojk” (“A Sámi Girl’s Joik”), that could be seen on Swedish television in 2008. “I really wanted to describe what it is like to be in this search for identity. I didn’t actually care about traditional joik, even though I attended a joik course. The interesting thing was the belonging.”94

In addition to her independent approach to joik, she also wanted to design her own gákti, a traditional piece of clothing, in non-traditional colors.95

It was a shaky journey, and she decided to draw her own map of the road. Her own comments as a director on the movie’s homepage, reveals how personal the making of the documentary was. She was prepared for a conflict between the identity she desired and the identities offered by the Sámi community: “If it turns out that I am not comfortable with what I meet, then so be it. I can find out how to be a Sámi in my own way, without depending on getting accepted by them.”96

In an interview made by the news magazine ETC in 2011, Wajstedt describes her childhood, and we encounter the significant silence also here: “Back then it was not accepted to be Sámi. I never learned anything about Sámi culture or language. We who grew up in the town never learned. Kiruna is a very Swedish town, in the midst of Sámi country. I avoided telling people during my upbringing that I was Sámi.”97 In her home town, she heard Sámi people being called “Lapp bastards”, but when she moved to southern Sweden she met the opposite: people found her exciting and exotic. But Wajstedt herself is against all romanticism around the Sámi: “I refuse to celebrate the Sámi national day at Skansen.”98

In traditional joik, one never sings about oneself. But Wajstedt was mourning herself and her past, so that was what she longed to joik about. In making a collective narrative hers, and retelling it in her own words and actions, using the traditional medium of singing joik in an untraditional way, she claims that there is no “right way” to be a Sámi. The work she is doing during the making of her documentary is equivalent to Freud’s “working through”, which includes grieving and acknowledging the loss. Her refusal to celebrate in Skansen’s way and her “misuse” of joik and traditional garments are what Butler calls subversive acts, where the “culturalization” and “othering” of the Sámi is in a way recalled, but at the same time displaced.99

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95 Labba 2008.


98 Thorén 2011.

Joik and storytelling are two vital parts of Sámi tradition. Emily Achieng’ Akuno describes how music and language are intimately related to each other, and how they constitute a foundation for identity formation, much in accordance with Ricoeur’s argument on how the Self comes to be in relation to, and through the language of, the other. Through music and verbal expressions, both individual and collective identities are formed and strengthened, inseparably:

Music as a work of art has a dual function — recreational and ritual. It serves physical and emotional needs while addressing and cementing psycho-social and spiritual relationships.\textsuperscript{100}

Music is primarily sound. The melodic and rhythmic nuances are a reflection of the spoken language, as they follow the tonal inflections and accents of the spoken word. Even non-song music is an identity tag, recognizable by those who are familiar with individual communities’ verbal expressions. The music becomes a mark of identity. The structure of the music, which often takes shape during performance or composition, is a reflection of other structures in the community.\textsuperscript{101}

The musical tradition and its linkage to the common language offer an opportunity to grow together, and a way to process change, maybe even trauma. When history is retold, or resung, it is adjusted to the present, and to the individual person doing the telling. That person gets to narrate his/her own Self, its relation to the group, and the identity of the group.

One of the biggest obstacles for overcoming the melancholia that operates in Sámi cultural identity formation is that the Swedish state still has these issues in a firm colonialist grip. Sweden, as the only out of four countries has not ratified the ILO convention 169. The reasons remain unclear. In 2010, a right wing politician claimed that Sweden could not afford a ratification of that convention, a controversial view later contested by one of her political opponents, who nonetheless found the convention problematic.\textsuperscript{102} The convention has been criticized out of “concern about the Sámi” by a number of politicians and other actors in Norrland:

What they really say, though wrapped up in a typically Swedish way, is that the Sámi are not to have any special rights. That it is “the Swedes” that control the Sámi. And that the Sámi should be wary of making any claims because in that case there will be trouble. The same thing, but more pronouncedly, was expressed by a land owner who at an information session on the convention said that “if Sweden signs it we will get a new Kosovo here”.\textsuperscript{103}

\textsuperscript{100} Emily Achieng’ Akuno: ”Sing me a life: Music as a People’s Identity”, Culture, Performance & Identity, p 184.
\textsuperscript{101} Akuno, p 185.
The official attitude from Sweden’s side, that it as a nation state can manage the Sámi issues and policies quite sufficiently on its own, is remarkable, but not mysterious. On the contrary, it is perfectly logical in the light of how Sweden as a brand and as a nation builds on a mythology of moral superiority. Which is what we will move on to now.

White Swedes

Swedish whiteness is a fortress of attitudes and traditions resting on a foundation of national romanticism, like a white noise (pun intended!) in the narrative of Sweden, Swedish culture, identity, and history. Sweden Democrat Robert Stenkvist puts it this way: “What is typically Swedish? […] That the answer is so hard to formulate is perhaps because there is so much and so obvious that is typically Swedish. When I look out the train window everything is so typically Swedish, how do I explain that in a few short, concise words?” 104 Scholars Catrin Lundström and Tobias Hübínnete are prepared to give him an answer: “A Swede is a white person and a non–white person is not a Swede. In other words, within the Swedish national imaginary the difference between the genetic concept race and the cultural concept of ethnicity has collapsed completely: whiteness is Swedishness and Swedishness is whiteness.” 105 From that follows that everything associated to white Swedes is considered typically Swedish, such as red cottages at the edge of the forest, while everything associated to non-white Swedes is considered typically non-Swedish, such as the projects in suburbs like Rinkeby or Skärholmen in Stockholm.

Threadgold has the following remark on whiteness:

The ‘white nation fantasy’ is analysed psychoanalytically to connect with a detailed discursive and historical analysis of ‘tolerance’, the power to tolerate and to be intolerant, and the possibility of the ‘easy shift from one to the other’.

Aina Valkare, in her study of how women from Latin America adjust to life on the Swedish countryside, argues that rural Sweden is a ”white geography”, a symbol national identity. 107

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107 Aina Valkare, ”Det är som med allt, man vänjer sig... ” En studie om kropp, rum och platsanknytning bland latinamerikanska kvinnor i landsbygden, Master dissertation in Urban and Regional planning, SU 2009, p 12.
In this white Swedish culture, it seems that nostalgia and melancholia are desirable feelings, unconsciously and automatically iterated and reiterated as a way to “grow” a cultural identity based on nationality and ethnicity. In accordance to my arguments on nationalism and pathology in the introduction chapter, the nation state takes the place of a love object, which demands loyalty to remain intact. White Swedes are supposed to get sentimental when they look at a sun lit meadow where blond little children pick flowers, or when thinking of the mystical and silent forest. The sentimentality is strongly connected to childhood nostalgia, to a perception of Sweden as a safe-haven for all innocence and goodness. In this rural paradise even the most vulnerable can roam free, safe from war, revolutions, predators, or even the knowledge of inequalities and atrocities belonging in the “big world”. What white Swedes ultimately grief is their childhood naïveté, where ignorance is not only bliss, but also freedom.

The national romantic idea of Sweden as a land of healthy, fair-haired children and their free peasant parents, working their fields while singing under the sunlit blue sky, emerged as a reaction to industrialism, urbanization and mass-production, modern movements that hit Sweden, a quite under-developed country, like a storm surge during the last decades of the 19th century. The intellectual and cultural elite started a nostalgic craze for everything old, traditional and authentic, celebrating the simple life, nature and everything folkloristic, in their mourning of the old society.

Old structures and hierarchies were tore up, and one of the new ways to address old problems like poverty and oppression was to emigrate to America. The emigration movement involved more than one million Swedes, and lasted, with varying frequency, during some seventy years. When crop failure and famine struck the country, whole parishes in the Swedish countryside were drained of inhabitants. The emigration is perhaps the worst trauma that Sweden has suffered during the last two hundred years, but is probably also the one major factor that turned Sweden into the wonder of modernity, economic success, equality, democracy and reform as which it has been celebrated during most of the 20th century.108

One of Sweden’s most beloved and renowned authors is Wilhelm Moberg, who wrote an epic about a family emigrating from Småland to Minnesota. This literary series, comprising four parts, was published between 1949 and 1959, that is, during the founding era of “Folkhemmet”. Ironically, while telling a story about evading famine, religious oppression and work situations equal to serfdom, it is a tribute to what Moberg himself, in “Swedish striving”, calls a “proud poverty”, which generates a “free and sound child growth, like the one of the wild plants among the junipers in the meadow”.109

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The Swedes have earned the right to their country. Sweden is ours since thousands of years by the farmers’ and users’ natural right, through the fathers’ sacrifice of blood, through the distinctive culture that has been created here.

What Sweden is today, is what dead and living Swedes has made it into, and no-one else. Sweden is today ours by Swedish efforts. The task of the living Swedes is to maintain it and improve it by continuing these efforts — on the basis of freedom. We are a small people, but we have a vast country to inhabit. Look at the map of Europe! Our country spreads widely on the continent. But we are the people of the few, of the lone cottages, and even if we nowadays partly live in cities, do we at some time originate from the huts of peasants, tenant farmers, crofters.

[...] This is our own, that which will never be traded against something foreign. This is the root and the blood line, my spiritual heritage that I am to pass on intact to my own children. This is to me the Swedish, the irreplaceable.110

These are the notions and sentiments of the modern Swedish elite promoting the new welfare state. The image of Sweden as ancient, free and utterly unique is a direct heritage from the national romantic era of industrialization and emigration, and a historical revisionism. The Sweden romanticized by Moberg and his predecessors was actually a development country whose natural assets were heavily exploited by the economic elite, including the state, and hardly existing as a unified nation, and what was before that would not even be recognizable as Sweden.

Valkare mentions the concepts ”topophilia”, describing the emotional ties between humans and places, introduced by geographer Yi-Fu Tuan, and Morén-Alegret’s ”ruralphilia”, that denotes the specific positive feeling evoked by the countryside.111 We keep these concepts in mind when we read Sweden Democrat Robert Stenkvist, putting his thoughts into words:

A well-travelled fellow student once told me that Swedes are like Marianne-candy, hard on the outside and soft on the inside, the Americans were like cherries, soft on the outside and hard on the inside. Perhaps she was right. Perhaps did she point out another national character, shaped by the vast distances and big forests. I leave the judgment of that to the


This idea of Swedes as having a special relation to nature and its animal life has clearly an aura of nostalgia and national romanticism about it. What is perceived as “wild” forest in Sweden is actually, mainly, a vast spruce plantation, hardly more than 70 or 80 years of age. Sweden has maybe never been as densely forested as it is now.\textsuperscript{113} As for the wild animals of Sweden, they are either game (fowl, deer, elk, hare, etc.), or competitors for the game (bear, eagle, wolf, fox, wolverine, etc.). In either case, they have been hunted, wolves to the extinction. If any wild animal in Scandinavia had a special place in people’s hearts it would be the wolf, but that was hardly an expression of “we feel for animals and nature”, since the wolf has been compared with the Devil himself. Even though wolves were gone for decades in the beginning of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, they have kept their demonized, almost mythical, status among people, especially on the countryside.\textsuperscript{114} Hunter’s organizations also claim that there is low or zero tolerance for wolves in the Swedish environment.\textsuperscript{115} Wolves stand as a substitute for all the “Others” and foreign dangers that potentially threat the conformity and safety of the homogenous white society. The state is often held responsible for the trouble caused by the presence of predators, and demands are made that people, cattle and dogs are to be protected from attacks, preferably by banning the wolf. This seems like an reiteration of the national romantic conception that the Swedes are a people conquering the forces of nature, coping against all odds, that is paired with the notion of the state in the role of the “mother” of the “people’s home”, who should take care of and safeguard her children so they can once again roam free and light-hearted through the silence of the forest. The expectations on the state to care for everything is at the same time a suspicion that it will turn into a controlling and prohibiting parent, that tries to limit the so appreciated freedom. Land property and hunting rights stand as symbols for that freedom.

In urban centers, among the privileged white bourgeoisie, the nostalgia takes a somewhat different form. Jan Lööf, a popular author and illustrator of children’s books, is particularly appreciated for his nostalgic images of a past, industrial, Sweden. His illustrations of towns and cities display idealized urban environments from the era of “Folkhemmet”, and grow visibly more nostalgic with each new book, which coincides with society changing and Lööf himself growing older (he is an eager defender of the junction

\textsuperscript{112} Stenkvist 2011, my translation (En berest studiekamrat sade en gång till mig att svenskar är som Marianne-karameller, hårda utanpå och mjuka inuti, amerikanarna var som körsbär, mjuka utanpå och stenhärda inuti. Kanske har hon rätt. Kanske satte hon fingret på en annan nationalkarakter, som de stora avstånden och de stora skogarna format. Jag överlåter till läsarna att bedöma detta. Vi lever nära naturen och för inte länge sedan levde vi också av naturen, det har också format oss. Vi känner för djur och natur.)


Slussen in its original design.\textsuperscript{116} The cars are of old brands and makings, people dress in ways that associate to the 1950’s—70’s, and the street scenes are characterized by small-scale business and industries. In his imagery, Lööf tries to restore the typical Swedish urban life of his childhood and youth. These well-known, safe, urban environments are contrasted against a fantastic, fairytale-like “Other”, where many features are taken from the kind of adventurous stories children would read in the 1940’s and 50’s, such as treasure hunting, pirates, “Arabs” with scimitars, exotic jungles and islands, half-naked “Africans”, etc. Following this, his stories and images display a peculiar ignorance, as part of an intended naïveté with the purpose of creating a sense of the fantastic power of imagination.

In “Grandpa is a pirate”, the protagonists set out with a ship to retrieve a treasure, and are taken prisoners by “Arabian” pirate Omar and his men. The young boy who is the “I” of the story manages to outwit Omar, free his grandfather, and escape with the treasure as well as a flying carpet. Before they return safe at home, they drop both treasure and carpet in the ocean.\textsuperscript{117} The “Arab” Omar sports a huge hooked nose, bushy eyebrows and a long, pointed beard. He wears a big turban, golden earrings, pointed shoes and puffy trousers. His men wear fez, and their island is like a palace, crested with onion domes. In this book, the nostalgic urban sceneries are absent since in 1973 that kind of environments were still quite dominant in Swedish towns and cities, and thus not yet missed.

In “Pelle in the jungle”, the (white) boy Pelle, searching for building material for his tree-house, finds himself transferred to a jungle, where he meets Tarzan and saves a monkey from being captured by zoo-keepers.\textsuperscript{118} Judging by the depicted animals, it seems to be an African jungle, although many of these animals (rhinoceros, giraffe, marabou) typically live in a different environment.

This peculiar jungle, with its mix of animals from different kinds of habitats, meets us again in “Catch Fabian”, and this time, “the jungle” is situated in a specific geographical place, namely the Gold Coast. The protagonist here is a (boy) monkey, who is captured by zoo-keepers (the very same ones as in “Pelle in the jungle”) and brought to a zoo. He escapes and is aided by nice people back to “Africa”, where he takes a train to the “Jungle Station” and, finally, returns to his mother.\textsuperscript{119} In his attempt to outrun the zoo-keepers, Fabian takes us through a somewhat distorted, but fully recognizable Stockholm, including the jazz club Fasching. While the zoo-keepers search for Fabian in the crowded jazz club, a constellation of black artists play before the audience. The star is composer and jazz pianist Thelonious Monk\textsuperscript{120} with his band, but a guest artist is also on stage, playing a huge conga drum. He is half-naked, wearing a loin cloth and colorful body paint. Around his neck, waist, wrists and ankles are massive gold rings. He also wears a colorful headdress and sun glasses. His name, says a poster on the wall, is Kwakuba. Just like Thelonious Monk, this

\textsuperscript{118} Jan Lööf: \textit{Pelle i djungeln}. En bok för alla, Hungary 2008.
\textsuperscript{120} Thelonious Monk, 1917—1982.
figure is based on a real (deceased) person, actually living and playing music in Stockholm during the 1970’s. An image search on the internet renders a few pictures of him, of which none resembles the one in Lööf’s book. Nevertheless, Lööf lets him keep all his crazy, “African” gear and half-nakedness throughout the story, as he goes to bed, visits the Technical Museum, and as he returns to the Gold Coast with Fabian. And actually, Anthony Kwaku Baah was born 1944 in the Gold Cost, but I doubt that he would have appreciated to return there as an adult, since The Gold Coast was the British colonial name for the country that since 1957 is the independent republic of Ghana.

I find it suitable to quote Hübinette and Lundström:

[…] notions of Swedish whiteness evolved alongside the image of Sweden developed during the Cold War, decolonization and the social revolution of 1968: that of Sweden as paradise on earth and utopia for human rights, democracy, gender equality and antiracism, where race as concept and as category has been rendered irrelevant and obsolete.

This is why Lööf, uncontested, can contrast the well-known Swedishness against a jungle “Africa”, where black people dress up in exotic gear. He is uncontested because he is in good and pleasant company. Watch the stories of Bamse and the lion cub Leo, and read the book “Raketresan”. This is the same exotic and supposedly innocent image of “Africa” as behind the attribute “Negro-ball”. In May 2012, 131 persons have joined the Facebook group “Preserve the word Negro-ball” (“Bevara ordet negerboll”), 26 100 persons “like” the page “Swedish Negro-balls” (“Svenska Negerbollar”), and 20 401 people give their thumb’s up for “WE WHO DON’T FIND NEGRO-BALLS RACIST!!” (“VI SOM INTE TYCKER ATT NEGERBOLLAR ÄR RASISTISKT!!”).

Why is so important to take a stand against the questioning of a dated, degrading expression? Hübetti and Lundström:

Sweden is currently undergoing a double crisis of Swedish whiteness. "old Sweden”, i.e. Sweden as a homogeneous society, and "good Sweden”, i.e. Sweden as a progressive society, are both perceived to be threatened by the presence of non–white migrants and their descendants. Both the reactionary and racist camp and the progressive and antiracist camp are mourning the loss of this double–edged Swedish whiteness.

White melancholia, so painful to bear yet unspeakable, is a psychic state, a structure of connection to the nation, common to Swedes as well as to the image of Sweden in the world.

121 Anthony Kwaku Baah, 1944—1983. Stage name Rebop Kwakuba, among others.
125 This is the peculiar name for a spheric chocolate pastry, rolled in granulated sugar, chocolate sprinkles or coconut flakes. The Swedish denotation “negerboll” doesn’t come across as obscene.
It is as much about the humiliating decline of Sweden as frontrunner of egalitarianism, humanitarianism and antiracism as about the mourning of the passing of the Swedish population as the whitest of all white peoples.\textsuperscript{127}

Author Fredrik Ekelund explains the anxiety and nostalgia driving former Social Democratic sympathizers to vote for the Sweden Democrats, retelling an evening with old friends: “The evening flashed of memories and funny stories from the past, a past when most of us always met under the red banners on Labor Day. […] When the upcoming election came under discussion, Stefan announced that he was going to vote for the Sweden Democrats. Charlie encompassed the decision with enthusiasm, but announced that he preferred SPI instead. Stefan has always been a thermometer into the national spirit. In the 70’s as now. His children went to Hermodsdsals school and up close has he been able to follow the gradual decay in one of Malmoe’s neighborhoods.”\textsuperscript{128} He is not contrasting “multiculturalism” against nationalism and a pre-modern traditionalism, in the way he himself perceives that a “fascist” would do,\textsuperscript{129} but against “Folkhemmet”, symbolizing modernity and common sense:

A number of questions appear as a result of the Sweden Democrats’ successes; Why has it become taboo to talk about and debate the contempt for ethnical Swedes and Swedish culture? Why is it “wrong” to worry about the expansion of Islam — only in Rosengård are seven basement mosques where extreme Islamism is preached; Islam is actually not kebab and falafel but a religion intimately related to politics, a religion that has not undergone the steel bath of enlightenment and where certain things seem incompatible with fundamental Western values, such as equality between the sexes for example?\textsuperscript{130}

Nostalgia and reminiscence leads to blame. We had something valuable, but it was taken from us. Refusal to grieve and acknowledge the loss leads to hostility against others, against “the Other”, but this is explained as a reasonable criticism of retarded and inhumane cultures and social structures.

From right to left:

\textsuperscript{127} Hübinnette and Lundström 2011.
\textsuperscript{129} Fredrik Ekelund: “Vänstern vägrar att tala om hela verkligheten”, DN 21 Feb 2012.
\textsuperscript{130} Ekelund 2012. My translation (“Ett antal frågor installer sig alltså med anledning av Sverigedemokraternas framgångar: Varför har det blivit tabu att tala om och debattera föraret för etniska svenskar och svensk kultur? Varför är det "fel" att oroa sig för islams utbredning - bara på Rosengård finns sju källarmoskéer där extrem islamism predikas; islam är ju faktiskt inte kebab och falafel utan en religion intimt förknippad med politik, en religion som inte gått igenom upplysningens ställd och där vissa saker tycks oförenliga med grundläggande västerländska värden, som jämlikheten mellan könen till exempel?”)
"The Swedish people have through hard work, good political judgment and common sense created a prospering, peaceful and democratic nation. Despite political mismanagement during the last decades, there is still enough power in the Swedish nation to also in the future give its population a high affluence, a well functioning social safety net and a “People’s Home”-community that renders security to its citizens in their daily life.”

This quote, from Sweden Democrats election platform for European Union elections 2009, reminds of Wilhelm Mobergs tribute to the “Swedish striving”, already nostalgic in itself. The Sweden Democrats is perhaps the most unabashedly populist party, but the other politic players also want to secure a ride on the wave of “People’s Home”-nostalgia:

After a dip during the 90’s, when the “People’s Home” was associated to social engineers intoxicated by power, wanting to adjust life for the citizens, the classic Swedish model now seems to have assumed the shape of a threatened paradise that all the political parties want to safeguard and rescue for the future. Social Democratic Labor Day speakers, who have always presented the Labor Movement as the architects and managers of the “People’s Home”, asserted also this year that the party will never fail its historical assignment. The New Moderates abandoned, after the massive defeat in the elections 2002, the rhetoric of paradigm change and adapted to the role as the managers of the Swedish model.

And what has happened to the “Swedish model” now? A photo of people, unemployed and/or homeless, some of them immigrants from other EU/EEA countries, forming a bread line outside a church in central Stockholm in March 2012 was spread in media:

Many probably felt that history repeated itself. Not the least I. It was telling when the Swedish Labor Movement Archive fished out a picture from 1936 of a line of hungry and unemployed people outside Filadelfia church. The pictures were put side by side. Has not more happened in 76 years?

"A very old Sweden is coming back, in the wheel tracks of the dismantling of the social security networks. The Moderate Party knew that this would be the result. But they don’t care”, Aftonbladet’s Anders Lindberg wrote.

And he is right. The picture touches a string deep in people. A feeling that we have lost direction. That we have lost momentum.

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That everything we thought that we had is being wasted.\textsuperscript{133}

“[…] the quality of a discourse on history depends on the disturbing questions it raises and the sometimes slippery bridges it builds between the past and present, bridges that are not always safe.”

Shlomo Sand — *The Words and the Land*

**CONCLUSIONS AND FINAL DISCUSSION**

We have now reached the end of this study, and it is time to sum up my conclusions and discuss them as well as the possibilities of a continued study in the future.

Let us start with the questions I posed in my introduction. The first one was:

“‘In what way can melancholia and/or nostalgia be said to constitute a positive, in the sense constructive, part of cultural identity? Or: How can the process be described and analyzed, during which melancholia and/or nostalgia is made a positive part of cultural identity?’”

According to psychoanalysis, melancholia is the outcome of the loss of a love object, following this chain of events: loss – grief – not working through – melancholia. Since melancholia has the purpose of maintaining the love object intact, it has a preserving effect on attitudes, mind-frames, traditions, etc. This works through the resistance against change, since all change is perceived as a threat against (the idealized memory of) the love object. In performativity theories, becoming oneself constantly takes place through reiteration of norms, which is an unconscious process with semi-conscious and conscious elements. This works through a repeated series of (unconscious) choices, made from the precognitions one have. Melancholia can be said to be such a precognition. Since we cannot chose not to be and become, we have to build our identities even on that which threatens to erase us, if necessary. Judith Butler:

“At the most intimate levels, we are social; we are comported towards a “you”; we are outside ourselves, constituted in cultural norms that precede and exceed us, given over to a set of cultural norms and a field of power that conditions us fundamentally. […] The “I” who cannot come into being without a “you” is also fundamentally dependent on a set of norms of recognition that originated neither with the “I” nor with the “you”. What is prematurely, or belatedly, called the “I” is, at the outset, enthralled, even if it is to a violence, an abandonment, a mechanism; doubtless it seems better at that point to be enthralled with what is abusive than not to be enthralled at all and so to lose the condition of one’s being and becoming.”

My second question was:

“How is this process affected by discourses of power and the power of discourse?”

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This is a very complex matter, and could probably be subject to a dissertation in itself. This question is closely connected to question number three. Discourses of power have had a major impact on the strategies and thought frames that the post-colonial world has developed to move on. The ILO convention 169 can be seen as one result of this impact. The convention has played an important role for indigenous people world wide, not the least since it affects the level of independence with which these groups can handle and restore their cultural heritage.\textsuperscript{135}

The power of discourse, however, is bound to affect these processes ever more profoundly. We are surrounded and shaped by discourses prevailing since before we even come into existence, and our identities are founded upon elements we have no influence on, or possibility to choose from. As Ricoeur states, we have not even chose our own names. Our revolt against the power of these discourses is also dictated by them and dependent on them.

Another perspective on the power of discourse that has been visible during the work with this study, is the major effect that the absence of discourse has on these processes. Let me quote Judith Butler’s comment on the dehumanizing effect of denying people the possibility to public mourning:

“Dehumanization’s relation to discourse is complex. [...] There is less a dehumanizing discourse at work here than a refusal of discourse that produces dehumanization as a result. [...] If there is a “discourse”, it is a silent and melancholic one in which there have been no lives, and no losses; there has been no common bodily condition, no vulnerability that serves as the basis for an apprehension of our commonality; and there has been no sundering of that commonality. None of this takes place on the order of the event. None of this takes place.”\textsuperscript{136}

I feel that here we encounter Ricoeur’s “too little memory” as a strategy from the majority population to maintain the mythology of the nation state. As one group is silenced, the voice of the other group grows louder.

Question number three:

What is the connection between a cultural identity constituted as above, and the notions of nationality, ethnicity, and cultural heritage?

Idealization is a defence mechanism when falling in love or feeling reverence. This appears in groups and societies, expressed through stereotypes etc. creating a mythology based on a distant past, people and land. Ethnicity and nationality are equaled in this mythology and, cultural heritage is reduced to that which is perceived as a direct historical route from the ancient origin until now. This nostalgia tends to confuse the actual home with the idealized one, and is at the same time a product of modernity and a reaction against it. The responsibility of the individual in the society is to deal with one’s own fears, to contain

\textsuperscript{136} Butler 2004, p 36.
them, and not project them upon the Other." The nation as love object has an infantilizing effect on its subjects. Nationalism evokes and encourages melancholia and nostalgia. It turns remembering and working through into repeating and acting out trauma. Nationalism inflates already existing feelings of melancholia and nostalgia and has the potential to turn them into narcissistic depression.

And, finally, the fourth question:

“What is the benefit and what is the risk, of making melancholia and nostalgia positive parts of cultural identity?”

A short-term benefit is the unifying effect it may have on a community experiencing oppression, diaspora, war, and traumas of the like. This is often the case when the trauma is kept alive through story-telling, commemoration rituals, etc. But it can also have a dividing effect, especially when trauma is more unconsciously kept alive through silence. In both cases is the melancholia turned into a heritage, passed over to new generations that will live a trauma they have not themselves experienced. Seen as a psychological reaction to trauma, it is necessary to move on from the melancholic state and start the work of grief. One of the apparent risks when linked to nationalism is that the melancholia will generate aggression and, perhaps, violence. The more abstract the love-object, and the more unconscious the actual grief, the bigger the risk of this aggression turning to violent action. (Breivik)

So, culture is the process through which we become who we are, which means that our identities are our cultural heritage. When are born into a material and immaterial culture, we are born into the identity formation of others.

The hermeneutic spiral of experience is compulsive, we cannot chose not to become, not to interpret and categorize. Our limits define us. Pursuing them and striving to reach beyond them is the means to experience ourselves as consistent through time. Existence is a work never done, and even when we fantasize about being perfected and finished, we can never visualize being so, since that would equal death. Seizing to become is seizing to be.

Imaginative remembering is a vital part of the identity process. Our memories are the links to our former selves, and provide us with an experience of continuity over time, that we have indeed always been one and the same. When we remember together, telling each other our memories, and even before the words come over our lips, they become narratives. During story-telling and memory-sharing, we synchronize our respective selves and construct a bigger narrative, that of our family, or our people, or our nation.

The growth of the nation state Sweden, and its further development into the “people’s home” Sweden, has had an infantilizing effect on the Swedish cultural identities. Especially the white Swedes have cultivated an identity of innocence and openness that totally

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137 Svein Tjelta: The Foundation Matrix and the "Global Village" in Relation to the Dynamic Variables of Idealisation and Denigration in Modern Society (With Some Examples from Norway), oral presentation at Shared Traumas — Silent Loss, Public and Private Mourning, Psychoanalysis and Politics, 10th March 2012.
depends on “too little memory”. By opening their arms to the world, with an attitude of neutrality and standing above conflict, white Sweden hoped, deeply unconsciously, to avoid blame and responsibility for its part in colonialism, racism, anti-Semitism, eugenics, etc. The Sámi population in Sweden is assimilated and has the same relation to the state as any other countryside Swede, a love-hate relationship of mixed expectation and suspicion. The hate part of this relation is boosted by the fact that the state provides the Sámi community with a lot of the romanticized imagery upon which many of them build their identity, as well as the administrative instances by which they communicate with each other.

It is time that Sweden let go of colonialism, racism and nationalism and embrace the full notion of what that means:

“If I understand myself on the model of a human, and if the kinds of public grieving that are available to me make clear the norms by which the “human” is constituted for me, then it would seem that I am as much constituted by those I do grieve for as those whose deaths I disavow, whose nameless and faceless deaths form the melancholic background for my social world, if not my First Worldism.”

The title of this dissertation, “A Valuable Void”, is a very suiting thought construction when it comes to museums, which are seemingly about excess, but essentially evolves around the accumulation of losses. Collecting is a way to ritualize and symbolize loss, to repeat but not working through. In contrary to what culture essentially is, namely growing, constantly changing and going through new stages, through collecting in museums objects are rendered inactive as carriers of cultural meaning. Museums are sites of institutional melancholia and of mourning, and in most case the melancholia and the mourning of the nation.

Nordic museum’s Sápmi exhibition tries to represent more than the reindeer herder and the primitive culture frozen in time. It seems like an attempt from the museum to pull their weight regarding reconciliation with the past. The Nordic Museum played a quite ungraceful role in the national romantic drama set up by Hazelius, and the about 6000 objects attained by Hazelius’ “gainers” from Sámi people around the turn of the century 1900, are probably an awkward reminder of that. I interpret the Sápmi exhibition as a way to recycle these objects and make their presence at the museum seem less suspicious, and to make up a bit for contributing to the “othering” of the Sámi. The question is: how much help will it be for Sámi actually trying to find their own identity and come to terms with the past?

The Sápmi exhibition asks the questions “Who is Sámi? Who is Swedish? Does it matter?” The first two questions are impossible to answer, Sámi and Swedish identities go in and out of each other throughout history, and will never again be separated. But for as

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138 Butler 2004, p 46.
140 Nordiska museet — svenska trender och traditioner, ”Sápmi”
long as there is so much silence to break, and so much mourning to do, the answer to the third question will be “yes”.

The conflicts regarding assimilation primarily take place within the individual, but it has an impact on all relations of that individual and so the melancholia keeps reproducing. The reparation of these unresolved processes requires a language and a public space in which these conflicts can be acknowledged and negotiated. Among therapists, it is well known that collective speaking acts, giving testimony, is a healing process, and that it, as well as the melancholia itself, affect the younger generations. Perhaps it is time for a truth and reconciliation commission in Sweden.

How to continue from here: One method that would be very informative is interviews, and not only one by one, but when suitable, also in pairs or small groups. Since the basic assumption for this study was that all identity formation takes place in relation to others, communication and exchange is relevant to study. This would be quite time consuming and most suitable for a more extensive study, such as a PhD dissertation, or a research project involving more than one researcher. It is my hope that an extended and/or complementary study based on interviews will be carried out in the future, since this method has the potential of providing extensive material. It is also necessary to investigate these processes in groups with other preconditions, such as groups living in diaspora, or traveling people.

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141 Eng and Han 2000, p 697.
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